

My resume cannot express my firm commitment to art as a means of communication, sharing, and being in the world. I have been a teacher for the past ten years, and an artist for even longer. In St. Louis, I collaboratively developed and implemented a Mural Arts Program at the Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma with a group of middle school refugees from Somalia, Liberia, Kenya, and Iraq. Working closely together with the center's therapists to provide a safe environment for open expression, we succeeded in creating more than a mural. We nurtured the seeds of friendship and communication that crossed racial, religious, and cultural divides. Art is so much more than a technique or a finished product. The "art" was not simply in the mural; the art was also in the *making*. The artistic and personal transformation of these young girls through the course of the summer left an indelible mark on my spirit. It was this experience that reaffirmed my commitment to becoming an art teacher.

I believe that learning should be a dialogue, with both teacher and students learning from and responding to each other. I begin by explaining the requirements and expectations of the assignment, as well as its contemporary, historical, or cross-curricular significance. In fact, the initial presentation of a project is key – the student's first glimpse of a project should cause them to question assumptions and spark their imagination. I always have examples, such as prior student works or my own sample pieces, to help students visualize and conceptualize the project. Students discuss concepts, strategies, and techniques during the introduction as a class. To accommodate multiple learning styles, I vary activities to include written reflections as well as breaking students into small groups for brainstorming sessions.

As an art teacher, I am involved in hands on activities with my students almost every day. Creating art is my passion, and my students cannot help but be infected by my enthusiasm. I look at demonstrations as a chance to inspire students with thought provoking and visually stimulating new ideas. After guiding the students through participatory demonstrations, I love the excitement that bubbles over at the precise moment right before students put their first mark on paper, or roll their first piece of clay. For complex projects, once the students have successfully completed the first stage, we continue with another hands-on demonstration. By breaking assignment into smaller pieces this way, students are more readily able to internalize information. It also gives students multiple opportunities for success within each project, and gives ample time for them to voice concerns and questions. Additionally, it allows me to continuously assess student progress, reflect and modify assignments as needed.

To accompany projects, I provide written instructions and a rubric. This helps students to understand what is expected of them and is useful as a reference for students who are moving at a faster pace. Throughout the entire process, I am continuously checking in with students to discuss their work and field any technical or artistic questions. Midway through the project, I often lead the class in a progress critique. This gives students a chance to practice the vocabulary that they have learned as well as to generate new ideas with their peers about how to improve or move forward with their work. When students are personally invested in their creative work and are able to critically present their ideas, I know I have succeeded in my job.